



July 22, 2010

Secretary Ian A. Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA)
Attn: MEPA Office
Ms. Holly Johnson
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: MEPA No. 13886
Green Line Extension Project, Cambridge/Somerville/Medford
Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (FEIR/EA)

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (DEIR/EA) for the Green Line Extension Project in Cambridge, Somerville and Medford, MA. We look forward to the coming phases of design.

We continue to believe that pedestrian access to the Green Line stations in this corridor is essential if the project is to prosper and serve its riders well, especially when the need for is reinforced by the lack of parking at the stations. We also believe that MassDOT is taking an exceedingly narrow view of providing for future pedestrian access. Here are the reasons why:

1. The Community Path is essential for the Green Line Extension to fully meet its potential to serve the residents of this corridor. It will function as a principal access route to and from the stations for walkers and cyclists. It will provide a safe and protected means of access leading between residences and the doors of the light rail vehicles. The same levels of access cannot be provided solely by relying on existing streets, which are less direct for users. We urge consideration of all possible ways to fund the path and include it as an integral part of the construction of this extension. We hope MassDOT will continue to support the path through preliminary design of the path with 100% detailed plans, including the essential connections between proposed stations and the path, and outlining the principal maintenance and safety concerns associated with the path.
2. Better pedestrian access to the stations can be provided beyond that shown in present designs. We have examined the drawings included in the DEIR, as you suggested, and they do not adequately address safe and convenient pedestrian access in all directions from stations. The requirements of the ADA, the MAAB, the BCIL agreement or internal MBTA standards that are cited should not form limitations on imaginative designs to serve pedestrians.
3. By way of example, here are some considerations we would urge in designing pedestrian access to stations, focused solely on the proposed Lechmere Station. This new station is to be located across O'Brien Highway from many of its present riders. The number of pedestrian crossing the highway near the station appears to be very high: we note that in FEIR Figs. 5-5a, 5-5b, 5-6a, 6-6b, the number of pedestrians projected to use the First Street/O'Brien Highway crossing in the morning peak is nearly a third of all people and vehicles passing through the intersection at that time. The evening peak projections are nearly as high. However, the station location will add as much as a minute or more for all pedestrian access. To encourage and enhance pedestrian traffic into the station, this might lead to consideration of:

- Extra-wide sidewalks to accommodate walkers on routes directly into the station; standard widths of 5' or 10' will do little to help the very considerable numbers of pedestrians and may cause crowding and safety hazards if pedestrians are not adequately accommodated. Usable sidewalk widths should be the standard criteria – not widths containing crash barriers, lighting signage, landscaping or street furniture.
- Near the station entrance, pedestrian traffic may be heavier on the station side of First Street than on the other side of the street. Sidewalks should reflect anticipated volumes of walkers.
- Bus-rail connecting sidewalks within and immediately adjacent to the station should be spacious and unobstructed by posts.
- Extra-wide sidewalks on the other side of O'Brien Highway along the pedestrian routes into the station. The most heavily traveled routes should also have wide crosswalks for safety. Crosswalks may need to be 20 feet wide or wider to promote visibility and awareness of pedestrians at the crossing of this busy street.
- Pedestrians refuge islands in the median of O'Brien Highway will raise safety levels for street crossings.
- Re-use of the old Lechmere Station site should reflect pedestrian routes; perhaps a diagonal walkway through the station parcel would be appropriate to better serve walkers to and from residential East Cambridge and the Middlesex County Courthouses. Such as walkway might fit nicely with local proposals for an outdoor market.
- A direct pedestrian connection between the station, the Community Path, and all surrounding North Point buildings. Interconnections serving the station should include First, Second, Third and Water Streets.
- Access to the new station via Second, Third or Water Streets is essential, perhaps linked via the Community Path or a sidewalk that connects with it.
- Signage that indicates preferential walking routes - the fastest and safest ways to reach the station.
- Signal timing that provides safe and adequate crossing times for pedestrians at all intersections.
- At least one “very handicapped-friendly” route to the station, signed and designated along the sidewalks leading to and from the station.

Our list for the Lechmere Station is an example of outlining issues to assure improved pedestrian access throughout the corridor. We hope that MassDOT will work with residents and city administrative agencies to improve walking conditions to all stations and along the full length of the corridor.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Green Line Extension. Please contact us for any clarification or additional comments that you may need.

Sincerely,



Wendy Landman
Executive Director



Robert Sloane
Senior Planner